AETIOLOGY

Review: depression and anxiety during pregnancy are strong indicators of postpartum depression


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What are the risk factors for postpartum depression?

CONCLUSIONS

Depression and anxiety during pregnancy are the strongest indicators of postpartum depression.

Commentary

Postpartum depression is the most common complication of childbearing occurring in 10–15% of recently delivered mothers, with well documented negative health implications for the mother, child, and family. The literature investigating possible risks for postpartum depression is vast and of variable quality.

This article is a synthesis of the recent literature from 1990–2002. It includes the results from two meta-analyses by O’Hara and Swain and Beck involving 12 000 subjects. It adds results from more recent studies involving a further 10 000 subjects.

The findings of this review have important implications for all health professionals involved in the care of recently delivered mothers.

Based on the research included in the synthesis, risk factors which are the strongest predictors of postpartum depression have been shown to be (in decreasing order of effect reported in terms of Cohen’s d) depression during pregnancy, anxiety during pregnancy, experience of stressful life events during pregnancy or early puerperium, low levels of social support, and previous history of depression.

The findings of this review reinforce the importance of exploring postpartum depression risk factor status when taking the mother’s history. Consideration could be given to the use of the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression scale (EPDS) for screening all new mothers in the immediate postpartum period. The efficacy of the EPDS is documented, such as the recent study by Dennis. Successful identification of risk factors allows timely implementation of appropriate preventive and treatment interventions.

The paper highlights the possible increased risk for postpartum depression in a specific group of mothers. Recent immigrants, who may be physically and culturally separated from their support systems, may be at risk due to the documented lack of social support.

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Please see http://www.ebmentalhealth.com/supplemental for additional commentary by Professor Meir Steiner.

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